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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002233

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL IZ

SUBJECT: DAWA TANZIM LEADER ON BASRAH AND FEDERALISM,
ELECTIONS LAW, INA/NDF/FADHILA COALITION, SFA/SOFA

Classified By: Pol Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with Dawa Tanzim COR members Dr. Abdulhadi al-Hassani and Qassim al-Sahlani July 16 at the Dawa Tanzim party's COR office, Hassani spoke about his recent trip to Basrah, expressing dismay at the lack of reconstruction in Iraq's second city while intimating that Basrah may be better off within a federal region. Regarding the delay in passing the Elections Law, both Hassani and Sahlani argued that postponing the provincial elections in Kirkuk was not a viable option, and the Kurds would need to compromise on the issue of Kirkuk. In their estimation, the 32/32/32/4 option, though not perfect, was the best solution at the present time. (Comment: Kurdish and Arab bloc leaders are negotiating language to allow a delay in Kirkuk elections. A vote is expected on July 21. End Comment.)

The two men were extremely dismissive of the newly-formed INA/NDF/Fadhilah bloc, rumored to also include the Sadrists and former

PM Ibrahim Jaafari's Reform Trend. Openly skeptical about how long the different parties' leaders and parties would be able to coexist, the two also questioned whether the bloc sought to be a legitimate opposition bloc or merely an obstructionist entity. Weighing in on the SFA/SOFA, the two stated that though most pragmatic Iraqis recognized the need for a comprehensive security agreement with the United States, the Iraqi public would not tolerate any agreement seen as

imposed upon them by the United States. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a meeting held July 16, Dawa Tanzim representative Dr. Abdulhadi al-Hassani discussed his recent trip to Basrah, stating that though the security situation in Basrah had improved, he was dismayed with the overall lack of reconstruction and development in Iraq's second city.

Hassani, a native Basrawi, recounted that when Shaikh Zayed embarked on Abu Dhabi's ambitious development plan in the 1960s, he used to counsel patience among his skeptical citizens,

assuring them "that one day Abu Dhabi would be like Basrah." Shaking his head in disappointment, Hassani stressed that the GOI could do more to promote investment and economic development in Basrah, and suggested that the current government

is too focused on Baghdad. Though acknowledging that he supports a strong central government, he indicated that Basrah's

future may be better served within a federal region that could also include Thi Qar and Maysan provinces.

¶3. (C) Turning to the Elections Law, Hassani said that most Iraqis want the provincial elections to take place as soon as possible, and asserted that the Kurds would need to compromise on the issue of Kirkuk. Joining the meeting late, party

leader Qassim al-Sahlani concurred with Hassani, and both men stressed that the 32/32/32/4 option, though not perfect, is the best solution for now. They also said that postponing the elections in Kirkuk is not a viable option, alleging that

the Kurds have already moved hundreds of thousands of Kurds to the province since 2003, and would probably use any delay to continue their attempts to change the facts on the ground.

¶4. (C) Commenting on the newly-formed INA/NDF/Fadhilah coalition, which may also include former PM Jaafari's Reform Trend

and the Sadrists, both men questioned how long the disparate actors within the coalition would be able to work together, with Hassani stating that "they may be united in their voting now, but they are not (united) as a group." Sahlani added that it was unclear whether this group has been formed as a legitimate opposition party, or merely as an obstructionist, anti-Maliki bloc. Dismissing Allawi and Jaafari, both men claimed that they no longer enjoyed the popular support they once had, and Hassani sarcastically opined that if they were really serious about leading Iraq, they might consider spending more time in the country. As for the Sadrists, Hassani said that during the violent periods of 2005-2006, the Sadrists filled the political and security vacuum, but added that "Iraq has moved on, while the Sadrists have not."

¶5. (C) Before concluding the meeting, both men commented on the SFA/SOFA, arguing that though most pragmatic Iraqis realize the need for an agreement, ignorance, mistrust, and misinformation have negatively shaped the public's attitude toward the SFA/SOFA. They also cautioned that any eventual agreement will need to be seen by the Iraqi public as an agreement concluded between friendly nations, not a diktat imposed by the United States upon the Iraqi nation.

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